



# NORTH FORK FLATHEAD ROAD

SEPTEMBER 2010



## corridor study update

The North Fork of the Flathead Road (NFFR) runs from the City of Columbia Falls northward, passing near the community of Polebridge and up to the United States border with Canada. This pre-NEPA/MEPA corridor study evaluated a 13-mile section, from the junction with Blankenship Road (RP 9.5) to the junction with Camas Creek Road (RP 22.7). This segment of roadway is a Forest Highway (Forest Highway 61), on the state Secondary Highway System (HWY 486) and maintained by Flathead County.

The request for a study along this corridor came from Flathead County in response to the numerous concerns received from residents seeking a mechanism to make improvements along the gravel section of the roadway currently under the county's jurisdiction.

The final document discusses the findings and recommendations for the NFFR Corridor Study conducted by PB for Flathead County between March 2010 and August 2010. This newsletter presents the highlights of the document.

The purpose of the study was to gather information from the public to identify options and consensus, if any, to improve driving conditions and the surrounding environment along the corridor. The corridor study evaluated the feasibility of improving the corridor including assessing a range of low-level safety or maintenance-type improvements to consideration of major reconstruction. The intent of the study is not to identify a specific project, but give Flathead County options to consider in future planning and operation on the North Fork Flathead Road, if any public consensus exists.

The process involved a collaborative effort with Flathead County, other agencies and the public in identifying transportation problems and the most efficient and effective possible options to address the issues and concerns.

[www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/northfork/](http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/northfork/)

NEWSLETTER

## background and where to find the final document

For all previous elements of the corridor study process and to view the final document, please visit the website.

Paper copies of the document can be found at the following locations:

### In Columbia Falls

Columbia Falls Library  
130 6th Street West #C  
Columbia Falls, MT 59912

Columbia Falls City Hall  
130 6th Street West #A  
Columbia Falls, MT 59912

### In Helena

MDT  
2960 Prospect Avenue  
Helena, MT 59601

*(continued)*



## study objectives & corridor needs

Objectives for the study were identified at the beginning of the study process and were further refined based on input from the public and resource agencies. They include:

- Document existing conditions – roadway and environmental
- Review data available that projects future growth
- Identify corridor issues
- Develop corridor goals and possible improvement options
- Analyze future transportation improvements based on impacts, constructability, public acceptance, and financial feasibility
- Recommend possible improvement options and management strategies for long-term safety and operation of the corridor
- Maintain character of the area
- Develop dust mitigation strategies
- Review impacts on wildlife
- Identify maintenance needs - roadway surface conditions, including washboard and potholes
- Review travel speeds
- Document roadway safety
- Review emergency services

## strategies for identifying corridor problems

The following strategies were utilized to identify problems within the study corridor:

- A. Review of existing MDT reports – Existing reports that MDT has prepared for the corridor were reviewed and include the following:
- Preliminary Geotechnical Report
  - MDT Accident Analysis Reports
  - Environmental Scan

*Note: the Geotechnical Report and Environmental Scan are available in a CD or on the webpage and are included as part of the final document.*

B. Stakeholder interviews – Fourteen stakeholders (see list on following page) were interviewed. During the stakeholder interviews, safety and environmental concerns were discussed with landowners, resource agency staff, business owners, recreation outfitters, non-profit organizations and a local government official.

C. Engineering review of the existing corridor compared to current design standards – The existing roadway alignment was compared to current MDT design standards.

D. Public and agency coordination – Coordination with the general public and the resource agencies occurred throughout the study.

Feedback from the public and agencies was used to identify corridor issues and concerns, as well as potential improvement options. Several meetings occurred during the study process.

## background and where to find the final document (continued)

### In Kalispell

Flathead County Offices  
800 South Main Street  
Kalispell, MT 59901

Flathead County  
1249 Willow Glen Drive  
Kalispell, MT 59901

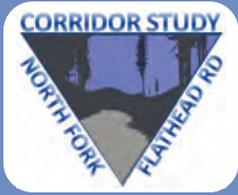
MDT

85 5th Avenue East N.  
Kalispell, MT 59901

### In Missoula

MDT

2100 West Broadway  
Missoula, MT 59807-7039



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## improvement options advanced for future consideration

Over 25 improvement options were analyzed to address the issues and concerns identified in the corridor study area and a detailed description of each option is included in Section 4 of the corridor study document. Options were grouped into five categories – maintenance, stabilization treatments, improve grading/surfacing, speed enforcement strategies, and bituminous surface treatment. A no-action option was also included.

All options were reviewed for potential cost and analyzed against eight criteria, each option was then reviewed for advancement or exclusion. Criteria for screening included:

- Helps with dust abatement
- Agrees with land use and management plans
- Impact to environment
- Impact to wildlife
- Potential to increase vehicle speed
- Improve road safety
- Potential to increase traffic
- Estimated cost over 20 years

While several of the improvement options presented in the study are feasible from an engineering perspective, only additional grading and stabilization treatments have public support. Regardless, implementation is dependent upon funding being secured.

## viable improvement options\*

Improvement Options	Viable Feasible / Public Support
<b>2. Maintenance</b>	
2a. Additional grading of current road	Yes/Yes
<b>3. Stabilization Treatments</b>	
3a. Bentonite	Yes/Potential
3b. Magnesium chloride/calcium chloride	Yes/Potential
3c. Lignin	Yes/Potential
3f. Road Oyl	Yes/Potential
3g. SoilSement	Yes/Potential

\*Implementation is dependent upon funding being secured.

## stakeholder organizations

Representatives were interviewed from:

- North Fork Land Owners Association
- Fire Department and Emergency Services
- National Parks Conservation Association
- Property Owner
- U.S. Border Patrol
- Recreational Trails, Department of Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
- National Resource Defense Council
- Adventure Cycling
- North Fork Preservation Association
- North Fork Compact
- North Fork Coalition for Health and Safety
- Columbia Falls Chamber of Commerce
- Guides and Rafting Outfitters
- City of Columbia Falls

## study conclusion and next steps

The public perspective gained through public involvement efforts found no consensus on potential improvement options based on the conflicting comments received. This resulted in no single option or group of improvement options emerging as a recommended priority for this corridor. Based on engineering and environmental perspectives, several of the improvement options presented in the corridor study are viable and have been implemented in similar sensitive areas in other parts of the country and Montana. Dust and maintenance issues continue as problems along this roadway and over the years, incremental development and tourism may have lead to higher traffic volumes. Regardless of the public's division concerning improvement options, some form of dust abatement measures appears necessary.

During the course of the study, many members of the public stated that if they could not have their preferred option (for instance either "pave" or "no-pave"), their preference is better maintenance and, if at all possible, one of the dust abatement treatments identified in the corridor study. Property owners along the corridor and other area residents using the corridor need to continue to work with Flathead County officials to identify and prioritize funding sources for dust abatement or any of the other identified improvement options.

The next steps for this segment of roadway will need to be determined by Flathead County. This study provides a diverse list of improvement options and management strategies for consideration. If any option demonstrates public buy-in, is selected and funding is available for that option, a project implementation process would begin, including any required environmental process.

[www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/northfork/](http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/northfork/)



## contact us

**Jim Dupont**  
Flathead County Commissioner  
406.758.5503

**Sheila Ludlow**  
MDT Project Manager  
406.444.9193

**website**  
[www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/northfork/](http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/northfork/)

**email**  
[mdtnffrteam@mt.gov](mailto:mdtnffrteam@mt.gov)